

*St Mary's Parish Church, Haxby
Journeying through Advent 2020
to Epiphany 2021*



TALKABOUT..



The editors would like to extend grateful thanks to all our contributors and wish them and all our readers a safe and peaceful Christmas.

Front and back covers both from <http://clipart.christiansunite.com/>

CHRISTMAS QUIZ ANSWERS

(1) Incense (*Matthew 2 v 11-12*); (2) Magi (*Matthew 2 v 1-2*); (3) Obed (*Matthew 1 v 5-6*); (4) Shepherds (*Luke 2 v 8-18*); (5) Joseph (*Matthew 1 v 18-25*); (6) Census (*Luke 2 v 1-7*); (7) Simeon (*Luke 2 v 25-35*); (8) Rabbi (*John 1 v 35-39*); (9) Augustus (*Luke 2 v 1*); (10) Herod the Great (*Matthew 2 v 13-18*); (11) Thomas (*John 11 v 16*); (12) Yahweh - usually translated into English as JEHOVAH - see *Exodus 6 v 3* in the King James Bible.

When you unscramble the initial letters of the answers the message is CHRISTMAS JOY

The Hawthorn's Christmas tradition 50 years ago.

We had four children aged four and under! How to keep them safe from tree lights and wires or pulling the tree over? Answer - put the tree and wires in our large old-fashioned playpen. We could also put the odd present in there as well. We opened presents on Christmas Eve, otherwise Christopher would have been too busy taking services to experience the joy of watching his children opening presents. Father Christmas arrived overnight. After Twelfth Night I could return to 'my safe space'. Guess where? In the playpen!

Margaret Hawthorn.

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Contributions may be edited

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'I Want my World Back.'

I want my world back, God.
Why did you let them take it away?
My world was large and colourful,
I knew it so well.
My world was filled with family and friends,
house and garden, shops and Church...
Where has it all gone, Lord?
Please can I have it back?

I don't want a world where I can't see my friends
when I want to,
where I can't hold hands with my family.

But - stop! Wait!
I could never be alone...
the Creator of the *whole* world is with me;
my world is his world and his world is mine.
How vast his world is,
how great he is.
What does he want of me
in this new world of mine?

He wants to open my eyes
to open me
to help me see again
to reach out and touch the lives of others.
Lord,
I understand now:
My world is not smaller but larger
Because you have extended it.

Thank you, Lord
for this opportunity
to laugh and cry
and to hold the hands of strangers.

With apologies to Corrinne Bailey

David Porter

From the Rector

Comfort and Joy

A publisher of a national Dictionary has proclaimed 'lockdown' as the word of the year for 2020. I expect most of us would agree. Our list might also have included 'unprecedented' or 'social distancing'. Could we have predicted before Christmas last year that a virus would have such a devastating impact on our personal, communal and worshipping lives?

Words and phrases matter, and as a linguist, I am fascinated to see how their meanings change over time. One of the carols we might anticipate singing this year is 'God rest you merry, gentlemen'. This carol has been around a long time, probably since the 16th century. Yet I have often wondered why a hymn in praise of Christ's birth should begin in such a way. So let us delve a little deeper. The word 'rest' does not imply putting our feet up! As in the anthem 'O rest in the Lord' it means 'remain' - a bond or commitment. 'Merry' does not necessarily mean an unlicensed and profligate merriment - its root is 'happiness' or 'contentment'. In the legend of Robin Hood we understand him to be accompanied by his 'merry men' - here implying a strong band of people, committed by a cause to each other. *[And notice where the comma appears in the first line of the hymn - we are all 'merry', not just the gentlemen!]*

So the carol confidently proclaims that by remaining in a strong commitment and happiness in God, 'let nothing you dismay'. Our comfort and joy, in which the carol repeatedly rejoices, comes from the birth of Jesus Christ on Christmas Day - to save us from Satan's power. Never have we needed such a message as in this year.

In earlier times it would be commonplace for the Church to declare a faith in 'the Holy Ghost, the Comforter'. This is not a faith based on a much-needed compassion for which we all long. It is a belief based on proclamation - the comfort (or 'bringing-forth') of the good news of the birth of Christ and

the salvation he wrought on the cross. This is the comfort of the incarnation and the resurrection we can share with one another.

And we can also do so in 'joy'. Joy is not a denial of the harsh realities of life or the struggles of faith. It is joy expressed in Christian hope. William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury (and formerly of York) at the time of the Second World War once wrote: "Christian joy and hope do not arise from an ignoring of the evil in the world, but from facing it at its worst. The light that shines for ever in the Church breaks out of the veriest pit of gloom."

May I, then, conclude with this lovely blessing from our Christmas liturgy:

May the Father, who has loved the eternal Son from before the foundation of the world, shed that love upon you, his children. May Christ, who by his incarnation gathered into one things earthly and heavenly, fill you with joy and peace. May the Holy Spirit, by whose overshadowing Mary became the God-bearer, give you grace to carry the good news of Christ. And the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

O tidings of comfort and joy!

Advent HOPE

We all know it has been a weird year, filled with previously unrecognised challenges. We enjoyed the warmth and wonder of a beautiful spring, the gradual emergence of summer, before the resurgence of living life with restrictions. At the time of writing this, our efforts are being called upon once again and there is media talk of a digital



One Solitary Life.....

He was born in an obscure village. He worked in a carpenter's shop until He was thirty. He then became an itinerant preacher. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a horse. He didn't go to college. He had no credentials but himself. He was only thirty-three when the public turned against him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to his enemies and went through a mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While He was dying his executioners gambled for his clothing, the only property he had on earth. He was laid in a borrowed grave. Centuries have come and gone, and today He is the central figure of the human race. All the armies that have ever marched, all the navies that have ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat and all the kings that ever reigned have not affected the life of man on earth as much as that..... one solitary life.

For many 2020 has been the year we have sorted out cupboards, drawers and hidey holes. The powerful imagery revealed in the words above was found on an old Christmas card exchanged between Eric Thompson and Hazel Wainwright more than 30 years ago. The editorial team extend our thanks to them both for sharing this in readiness for the coming of Christmas.

Acts 5 v 31

God set him on high at his side, Prince and Saviour, to give Israel the gift of a changed life and sins forgiven. And we are witnesses to these things. The Holy Spirit, whom God gives to those who obey him, corroborates every detail."

6/7, including fasting in the days before. No wonder they did not return to school that day!

Although in the churches we celebrate Epiphany and the coming of the magi, for the rest of Britain it is Twelfth Night, the day to take down the decorations, and has no religious connections.

But in other countries it is a feast in its own right, three kings Day. In Switzerland we could buy Galettes de Rois (Kings Cake) sold with a crown and having a bean inside. These are puff pastry pies with frangipane inside. In homes the beans could be replaced by small figurines. Whoever finds the feve or the bean, wore the crown and is king for the day. If I am home for Epiphany I always make and share one.

The French king cake is made with brioche pastry to look like a crown, with wonderful coloured candied fruits as jewels to decorate.

In Catholic regions of Germany where my daughter is, at Epiphany the houses are blessed with C+M+B and the year, over the door. It could stand for 'Christus Mansionem benedicat' (Christ bless this house) or the wise men, Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar. It is written with chalk that has been blessed by a priest.

Dianne Cox

Psalms 72

Kings remote and legendary will pay homage, kings rich and resplendent will turn over their wealth. All kings will fall down and worship, and godless nations sign up to serve Him,

Because He rescues the poor at the first sign of need, the destitute who have run out of luck.

He opens a place in his heart for the down-and-out, He restores the wretched of the earth.

Christmas, whatever that might mean. They are missing the real message of Christmas.

Christmas is the season of HOPE. As Christians we need to reveal the true meaning by being strong in our faith, seeking out opportunities to share this gift with everyone we meet. So, as you participate in the Advent journey towards Christmas (*see the middle pages*) take some time to reflect upon all that Christ offers us.

However, there are days when things seem tough. Days where we can all feel discouraged or disturbed; dreary mornings, drab afternoons and dark evenings all seem to conspire to affect our mood and our determination to manage. In these days of limited social interaction there is help available, available to us all in our own time and place.

DAILY HOPE is a free phone number offering Christians the opportunity to listen to prayers, Bible readings and hymns we are familiar with (and maybe some new ones). Advent Sunday will be its launch of seasonal materials to bring comfort and joy to anyone seeking 'that something extra'.

0800 804 8044

Please don't forget that the Benefice is still offering pastoral support, Daily Hope is the chance to try something a little different at the time you decide prayer is needed.

"When solutions are just not right, when everything doesn't seem to be bright, when we feel the fear of flight and fight, there is one word that keeps us going.....HOPE Hope is the answer! Hope because it makes us strong, hope because it offers solutions when things are wrong, hope because it makes us feel like we belong. Keep hope alive - even if deep inside - then let it flourish and erupt and share its message with those you love, because Christ is our hope in God above."

(adapted from an anonymous verse on the internet)

Isaiah 9 v 6

And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

This has been such a strange year! Who would have thought, this time last year, that we would go through such devastating times? Who would have thought that we would rekindle our joy in Nature because we were all told to stay at home? Who would have thought we would have to pick our way through a minefield of notices and proclamations all intended to keep us safe but which only served to confuse?

Who would have thought that our family would grow by two beautiful grandchildren?

Last Christmas we were on the Caribbean island of Grand Cayman, in temperatures of 26-28C. It was a lovely, relaxing time with the family, swimming in an outdoor pool, wearing shorts, T-shirts and flip-flops, in December!

We saw wonderful Christmas lights as houses had their many decorations up, including bands of lights round the palm trees in the gardens. The shops had special offers on turkeys, Waitrose mince pies and eggnog.

It felt like a really good holiday, it just didn't feel like Christmas! Instead of putting on coats, scarves and boots to go out, we had to put on sunscreen. Instead of turning up the central heating we had to switch on the air-conditioning. I thought, fondly, of the Carol and Crib Services at home.

Then, on Christmas Eve late afternoon, we all went to a very special Cove where the steps were arranged like an amphitheatre. Many people came, jostling and wishing each other 'Merry Christmas'. We faced a large stone plinth that served as a stage, where the music group played and on which the local pastor stood. Behind them was the wide blue ocean and the sun was just beginning to set.

We had a prayer and sang familiar carols and suddenly Christmas had arrived! As the sun slowly sank into the deepening blue water the pastor reminded us that we were all there, whether out of belief or curiosity, because Jesus had first come to us. He came as a baby, into our world, to live a human life; and then he took all our sins away by dying on the cross for us, only to rise again as the prophesied Christ. God entered our world and paid the price needed for us to be with him in his heaven.

As the sun's rays finally disappeared, we were told that this was the

CHRISTMAS QUIZ.

- 1) This was the gift brought by one of the Three Kings to the baby Jesus.
- 2) Another name for the Three Kings who travelled from the East to pay homage to Jesus.
- 3) This man, the son of Boaz and Ruth, is named by Matthew as one of the earthly ancestors of Jesus.
- 4) These men were the first to come to the stable in Bethlehem seeking Jesus.
- 5) This man was Mary's husband and Jesus' earthly father.
- 6) This official requirement forced Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem where Jesus was born.
- 7) This man saw Jesus when he was presented in the Temple and made a prophecy about Him.
- 8) This is the title by which Jesus was known during His earthly ministry.
- 9) This man was the Roman Emperor at the time of Jesus' birth.
- 10) This is the cruel King of Judea who caused anguish to the women of Bethlehem soon after Jesus was born.
- 11) This man was one of Jesus' apostles, nicknamed Didymus.
- 12) This is one of the Hebrew names for God.

If you unscramble the initial letters of your answers you will find my Christmas wish for you all.

Alice Showell

John 1 v 1-4

Before anything else existed, there was Christ, with God. He has always been alive and is himself God. He created everything there is - nothing exists that he didn't make. Eternal life is in him, and this life gives light to all mankind.

Epiphany

When I was chaplain at Aiglon College in Switzerland we had a lot of Russian students. The term in the new year started on January 6. But our Russian students had not returned, because, I learnt, in Russia, Christmas is celebrated on January

'There's a new world beginning from tonight' is the underlying theme of what is known as 'The Cowboy Carol'. At the end of this month of November we will be in the season of Advent leading up to the birth of Christ at Christmas. In Advent we begin the change of 'From Darkness into Light'. This again is one of the major themes of Christmas. In a world of deep darkness we find the light of Christ shining among us.

Recently I watched a television programme about the Hindu festival of Diwali. Like our own festival of Christmas it is an image of from darkness into light. St. John in his gospel writes 'The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never mastered it.'

The world of today with the pandemic is passing through a time of deep darkness, but there is hope because in Christ God came to live among us. He shares in our sorrows and He knows where we fall short. He brings new life to a tired and weary earth. With Him truth matters, fake news is set aside, honesty and integrity are upheld. **All He wants from us is our love and commitment.**

Let us build that new world. A peaceful and happy Christmas to you all.

Chris Hawthorn

After Christmas.

Now it begins.
When the star in the sky is gone.
When the kings and the princes are home.
When the shepherds are back with their flocks.
The work of Christmas begins.
To find the lost
To heal the broken
To feed the hungry
To release the prisoner
To teach the nations
To bring Christ to all
To make music in the heart.

Howard Thurman

point when candles were usually lit but it was too windy for that. Instead, people were asked to turn on the torchlight on their mobiles. Each little light joined together to make enough light for us all to see as we sang the final carol.

So, without trappings, without even a building to shelter us, we experienced the joy of Christmas Eve as a family, and as a Christian family together, as the waves lapped on nearby rocks.

Wherever, and however you celebrate Christmas this year, may the joy, peace and love Jesus came to share with us touch you and bless you and your family.

Barbara Symons

*God of love,
Open the hearts and minds of many this Christmas time
To the good and saving news of Jesus Christ,
That those whose lives are insecure, or empty, or aimless,
May find in the one born at Bethlehem
All that they need today, and much more besides.
For his name's sake.
Amen.*

From 'Worship today'

Prayer to give us comfort in our time.

When the darkness of autumn nights
Mirrors the gloom of uncertainty
That can fill our hearts and souls,
We look to you, the Light of the world,
In whom is no darkness at all.

Fill us afresh with the light of your presence;
Bring to our minds the many instances
Of your perfect goodness and grace.
We will praise you, the Light of the world,
In whom is no darkness at all. Amen.

From 'Praying in every season.' Mother's Union.



"STAR QUALITY APPEAL!"

As we begin our Advent journey, we want you to look up and see the bright twinkling of the stars in the night sky, leading us to Bethlehem and the Light of the World.

From Advent Sunday there will be a Christmas Tree on the front lawn at St. Mary's, decorated with solar powered twinkling lights. But we want it to sparkle with your stars at this special time of the year.

Thinking of all the difficulties brought about by Covid-19 in 2020, we would like to ensure that the Stars working behind the scenes are rewarded. **Who do you think has star quality?** The volunteer who delivers your prescription, the neighbour who has helped with your shopping, the tailors making scrubs, the NHS nurses and doctors striving to care against mounting odds. Who has touched your heart this year?

We are calling on everyone to bring stars to decorate the tree. Stars can be all colours and from any lightweight materials that are weather-proof; however, please ensure that your star is no bigger than the palm of your hand. Make your star, then write the name of your 'star' on the back. Stars can be left in the box at the foot of the tree (from 6 December) and will be used to decorate the tree each week during Advent.

Meanwhile, Haxby & Wigginton Methodist Church have

may well be stretched this Christmas: but we can think of the past times we have spent together, and know that there will be time ahead to pick up the pieces of normal living once again.

Bev

Isaiah 55:vv 8-9

Two verses that I find comforting.

Verse 8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

From time to time we find ourselves questioning God. Why has this happened? Why are we suffering? Why...? This is when I turn to these two verses.

Verse 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

We love our God and he loves us, but he is still far above us and we must remember this. We cannot know all the answers, only he knows, we can only trust that he will reveal them in his good time.

I find this comforting, why?

It seems to me that God is saying, "don't worry I am in control follow me, I will take care of you, just believe." And that's good enough for me.

Tony Mills

Matthew 2 v 2 and v 11

At about that time some astrologers from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the newborn King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in far-off eastern lands and have come to worship him!"

Entering the house where the baby and Mary, his mother, were, they threw themselves down before him, worshiping. Then they opened their presents and gave him gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

when the twins were small and jumping about in festive merriment waiting for Father Christmas that my Dad sat them down and told them this story:

“When I was a little lad, my family was quite big (Dad being the youngest of 14) and my Mam and Dad always tried to make Christmas special. Everyone got something even though money was always tight. One year, when I was about 5 or 6 Dad presented me with a gift that was wrapped - actually covered in brown paper. It was hard, heavy and knobbly and came accompanied with the instructions “Be careful with that lad!”

“I watched everyone else open their own gift, all were homemade over the previous months. Mine was the only one left when I began to open the parcel wrapping trying hard not to tear it away. My brothers were much older and didn’t hang around too long, whilst my sisters went into the kitchen to help with the meal. I was left alone in the living room with just my Dad. As the paper fell away it exposed a gift of a piece of wood with nails and mixed screws all firmly embedded and a short handle hammer. “Working with your hands will keep you busy,” said my Dad, “If you get good at it you might be able to make a living!” Dad and I spent the next hour or more hammering the nails into the plank and then back out, my Dad also showed me how the different screws would work and how to use the right tools. It was a special Christmas!”

The twins were astounded: “Why was that a special gift?” they asked in distain. “Oh, that’s simple!” replied my Dad, “It was the only time I can recall spending any time with my Dad - just him and me together. All the rest of the time I spent at home was filled with everyone else as Dad was almost always at work. His time and encouragement has stayed with me for a lifetime.”

In this year when spending time with family and friends has been uniquely difficult, I recall this story as if dad was standing next to me now! The sharing gift of time together

launched their “Star Gazers” initiative where everyone is invited to decorate their windows with stars. You can use your imagination and do a full star-themed window display - paper stars, origami stars, knitted stars, the list is endless! - or opt for an understated single star. It’s entirely up to you. Deck your homes with stars of all sizes - join in the fun this Christmas.

Let us remember that our future is bright; the Light of the World arrives as a gift from God at Christmas signalling love, joy, peace and hope for everyone. Churches everywhere are determined to reveal the presence of Christ, offering comfort and joy for everyone.

At Epiphany (6 January) all the stars will be collected, together with the gifts from the Wise Men, and given in prayer at the altar.

If further information is needed please contact Bev on 766602.

Luke 1 v38

Nothing, you see, is impossible with God.

When the children were little, to buy us a little extra time in bed on Christmas morning, we put half of a first treasure hunt clue in each of their stockings so they had to collaborate to find the next clue and so on until they found a little prize.

Clues started off simply (such as a picture of our TV under which the next clue lay). The tradition continued, even whilst they were at Oxford, by which time the clues were verbal, tougher and cryptic.

The fun ended when the two young Oxford scientists were furious at being stumped by "Look under the hydrated Magnesium Silicate"!!! (Talcum powder to you). I do miss the days when I knew more than my kids!

David Grice

The World

A rather lovely poem, a distraction from our present challenging environment, by William Brighty Rands, a 19th century poet. Originally a chapel preacher, he wrote many hymns, a shy eccentric man, he enjoyed writing children's nursery rhymes, many tales and words to music. He was born in 1823 and died in 1882 in London aged 58.

The World

Great, wide, beautiful, wonderful World,
With the beautiful water round you curled,
And the wonderful grass upon your breast
World, you are beautifully drest.

The wonderful air is over me,
And the wonderful wind is shaking the tree,
It walks on the water, and whirls the mills
And talks to itself on the tops of the hills.

You friendly Earth, how far do you go,
With the wheat fields that nod and the rivers that flow,
With cities and gardens, and cliffs, and isles,
And people upon you for thousands of miles ?

Ah, you are so great, and I am so small,
I tremble to think of you, World, at all,
And yet, when I said my prayers today,
A whisper inside me seemed to say,
"You are more than the earth, though you are such a dot,
You can love and think, and the Earth cannot"

Rosemary Clark

her into the car. She's slumped in the front seat. And she is so mad at us. The anger radiates out of her. But she can't express it. A five minute journey feels like an hour. I'm sweating by the time we get there. I feel sick.

We ring the bell. A smiling member of staff greets us. Mum is confused and disorientated. She doesn't live here - does she? Yes Mum, you do now.

This is awful.

The carer says, "Go now. It will be easier for everyone."

Ed and I turn away. I sob in the car. My son tries to comfort me. He's my son. This isn't fair. On him. On Mum.

As I write this I'm crying. The memories are still raw.

But we were lucky. We were blessed. We got to see Mum, up close and personal. We got to hold her hand and tell her we loved her.

She knew we loved her.

I know she loved me.

Ruth Pearson

Matthew 1 v 23 Angel's message to Joseph

'Listen! The virgin shall conceive a child! She shall give birth to a Son, and he shall be called "Emmanuel" (meaning "God is with us").'

Romans 6 v 23

But God's gift is *real life*, eternal life, delivered by Jesus, our Master.

Christmas is always a balance between the hurly burly bustle of shopping, gift wrapping, the tradition of carol singing in the streets and trudging along to church on cold and frosty mornings. Yet the continuity it bestows offers us a sense of sameness, the sense of comfort in the familiar and the sense of being together.

My Dad was a practical guy, who just loved Christmas. He would expend hours carefully choosing, making and especially wrapping the gifts he wanted to share. I recall one Christmas

very important things to do. First we had to go outside to the cloak rooms and give our hands a very good wash. Lined up along the wall, cheery Mrs Brown, with the biggest smile ever, checked that we had washed both hands, front and back. Quiet as mice, we followed her along the back of the building. I can still remember feeling surprised when we didn't go straight into the school hall / dining room. Instead, we waited in our line. Suddenly the kitchen door opened. Kitchen warmth seemed to billow out along the wall. The steam cleared, revealing one of the cooks standing there in her large white apron and soft hat. In her hand was a very big wooden spoon. In turn, each child was invited to enter that warm mysterious kitchen; then reappeared and directed up the steps to sit quietly in the hall. Waiting to see what was going on was butterfly exciting! Quiet whispers and laughter were suppressed under Mrs Brown's twinkly look. I stepped forward. The kitchen was a bustle. The windows were open-wide out over the school gardens. In front of me was a tall stool by a huge wooden table. I held on to the edge of the seat and was helped up by the cook. And then...WOW! I was looking down onto the biggest bowl of fruity pudding mix ever!! The great wooden spoon needed both hands to stir a Christmas wish into the mix. It smelt rich and full of promise!

Alyson Christy

Me, Mum, Dementia and Christmas

Scene:

Christmas Day

After the evening meal

Mum - clasping a huge tin of Cadbury's Roses to her chest. She's not happy. And absolutely refuses to share the chocolates.

Refusing to talk. She's furious with us.

Dad tries to hold her hand. He's so sad. You can see his heart is breaking.

Home time - Dad can't bear to come with us. We manage to get

Comfort and Joy

The scents of Christmas

Sounds and sights are wonderful, but for me scents evoke special Christmas memories. At home as a young girl I loved the scent of pine filling the warm house when the tree was brought inside; going to bed to the comforting aroma of mince pies made by Mum on Christmas Eve; waking to the mouth-watering smell of the turkey roasting on Christmas morning, pigs-in-blankets, Christmas pudding; all these very familiar scents. But years later, hosting the family celebration in our own home, what became very special was the heady fragrance of spring flowers. When Mum and Dad arrived for their Christmas visit Mum brought a box of her melt-in-the-mouth mince pies; Dad always came holding a bunch of the first daffodils. I don't know where he found them, but they brought so much joy. The joy of knowing the long, dark days of winter would pass; the joy of the promise of better things to come; the fresh, urgent scent of new beginnings. Dad died long ago, but a dear friend carried on his tradition. Still, each year, just before Christmas, we receive from a nursery on the Isles of Scilly a box of Cheerfulness, green stems with tight clusters of small yellow flowers, bright with promise and filling the house with the scent of spring. A true gift of comfort and joy.

Elizabeth Moran

The climax of the Carol Service and the Gospel for Christmas morning is the reading of the beautiful prologue from St. John's Gospel; "In the beginning was the Word ...". But writing as we enter lockdown for the second time, the fifth verse seems particularly relevant. For many of us, in so many ways, 2020 has been a difficult year. St. John says "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

As we journey towards Advent and prepare to celebrate the miracle of Jesus' birth - the coming of God's long promised Messiah into the world, let us give thanks for the way he

transformed it forever. The Messiah is the one who will bring hope and the salvation of all his people. Let us also remember to keep looking to the future with hope in Christ's return, when he will transform the world once and for all into the place God always intended it to be; his paradise for his people.

Ian Evans

Luke 2 v14

"Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Saviour has just been born in David's town, a Saviour who is Messiah and Master.

Advent encourages us to look back to the first coming of Christ at Bethlehem, and to look to the future when Christ will come again. I have always thought of it as a time to reflect and to escape from the endless commercialism and raucous sounds of the run up to Christmas, which seem to start earlier each year.

A good reflection might be on the momentous decision of the Virgin Mary when she said yes to the angel's announcement that she would bear the Son of God. I once heard someone say that the universe must have held its breath in those seconds before she agreed. There is also the voice of the Baptist calling for everyone to repent. It is amazing that as an unborn baby he was first to acknowledge the Messiah.

Let's hope Advent will be special for us all in these troubling times as we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Saviour of the World. Perhaps another reflection could be the words of that wonderful Christmas hymn: It came upon the midnight clear.

"O hush the noise, ye men of strife, And hear the angels sing."

Ian Strong

The final verse of the hymn 'I heard the voice of Jesus say'

I heard the voice of Jesus say
"I am this dark world's Light
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise
And all thy day be bright"
I looked to Jesus, and I found
In Him my Star, my Sun
And in that Light of life I'll walk
Till trav'ling days are done.

Horatius Bonar 1808 – 1889

Stir Up Sunday Monday

"Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people". So starts the Collect for the last Sunday before Advent.

It is thought that some of the seasonal baking that is associated with this particular Sunday started a long time ago. Families gathered together to sort the fruit for the puddings, stir them before they were steamed and stored ready for Christmas. Each year my sister and I helped mummy with the cleaning of fruit ready for the Christmas puddings and Christmas cake a bit before Stir Up Sunday. We picked little sticks off the sultanas and the gritty stones out of the raisins. This was to ensure time for it all to soak for a few days in the dark, rich smells of brandy and barley wine (I think)...tasted good to little fingers wriggling under the lids covering the great bowls! The puddings that were made in that year were kept back in the pantry until the following Christmas - made for a richer treat the older they were!

Way back in my first Primary School Christmas there is a very clear memory of the class teacher asking us all to sit very still and quiet as it was a very special day. There were some

ADVENT CALENDAR



2. First Lesson

God tells sinful Adam that he has lost the life of Paradise and that his seed will bruise the serpent's head.

Genesis 3 vv 8-19

1. Look outside - give thanks for God's wonderful world.

3. Phone someone you haven't spoken to for a while who lives close by / locally.

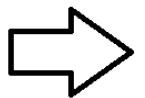
4. Let us be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Romans 12 v 12

5. Second Lesson

God promises to faithful Abraham that in his seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

Genesis 22 vv 15-18



21. Eighth Lesson

The wise men are led by the star to Jesus.

St Matthew 2 vv 1-12

22. Sing as many verses as you can remember of your favourite Christmas carol.

23. Phone someone you haven't spoken to for a while who lives far away.

24. Dear God, I pray that those people who don't have anyone can still have a Merry Christmas.

25. Ninth Lesson

St John unfolds the great mystery of the Incarnation.

St John 1 vv 1-14

